



## Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

### Following in the Footsteps of Prescribed Fire Pioneers

During prescribed fire operations, tipping liquid fire from a hand-held drip torch can be both a physically exhausting task and a highly coveted job. In 2006, the men and women who carried drip torches during the Upper Redwood Prescribed Fire also commemorated a piece of history.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Redwood Mountain giant sequoia grove became the birthplace of prescribed fire in the West. Here researchers discovered that sequoias depend on fire to regenerate and observed the effects of various fire intensities.

Those early years were not easy because prescribed fire was an unfamiliar practice in the West. Despite challenges, however, the early proponents of prescribed fire persevered and contributed tremendous knowledge to the field of fire management.

“Our ability to successfully implement prescribed fires today is linked to those first fires,” said Ben Jacobs, the parks’ Fuels Management Specialist. With respect in his voice, Jacobs elaborated that the foundation of the present prescribed fire program at Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks lies upon the lessons learned on Redwood Mountain.

One of those key lessons pertained to heat. An early prescribed fire in the grove burned more intensely than expected. Immediate public and expert opinions were not favorable. Yet, surprising observations surfaced after several years. Sequoia saplings later grew at the same location in exceedingly high density. Where managers merely endured heat, sequoias flourished.

More than two decades after those inaugural prescribed fires, Jacobs could not contain his excitement about following in the footsteps of the West’s prescribed fire pioneers. As burn boss of the Upper Redwood Prescribed Fire in July 2006, he directed the first crews to carry drip torches across the same ground as his predecessors. “Returning to the Redwood Mountain grove is one of the most satisfying prescribed fires of my career,” said Jacobs. “Being able to ensure the propagation of sequoias for future generations validates all the challenges of the prescribed fire pioneers.”



*In 2006, a fire crew walks along the Upper Redwood Prescribed Fire.*



*In 1969, a park employee escorts a CBS reporter around a Redwood Mountain prescribed fire.*